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SUBJECT: GOVERNOR HARUNA PESSIMISTIC ON ELECTIONS

Classified By: AMBASSADOR JOHN CAMPBELL FOR REASONS 1.4 (b and d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY. Ambassador and PolOff met with Governor Boni Haruna of Adamawa State on August 21. Haruna is supporting Atiku's presidential bid and says he is confident Atiku will win if there is "a level playing field." Haruna complained that the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) was being used to target the President's opponents and the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) was not adequately prepared to hold elections. He also said that former Head of State Ibrahim Babangida (IBB) has significant support among the country's elites. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) Haruna believes that Vice President Atiku Abubakar will win any presidential election where there is a level playing field. He bases his assessment on Atiku's nationwide network of supporters built from eight years as Vice President. He also said that in Nigeria, one builds popular support from the sense that one cares about people's day to day problems. Atiku has been able to build this sense of identification and should be able to build a popular movement to fill out the campaign organization he has already built. However, Haruna said that these factors will only matter if there is "a level playing field." He was quite pessimistic that fair elections would be held.

¶3. (S) Haruna said that the EFCC is being used as a political weapon to discredit potential opponents, and he believes this is happening at the personal direction of President Obasanjo. He cited the charges brought against IBB's son as a specific example. Because the Nigerian constitution prohibits someone from seeking elected office if they are facing criminal charges, a simple accusation from the EFCC is all that is needed to derail a political candidacy. The slow pace of the Nigerian justice system makes it unlikely that the charges could be faced and defeated quickly enough to satisfy the electoral calendar.

¶4. (C) According to Haruna, INEC is less ready for the 2007 elections than they were at the same point in the 2003 elections cycle. More importantly, he believes they are not moving aggressively to prepare. However, he said that it would not be hard to revalidate the voter rolls from 2003, thus overcoming one of the major challenges to election preparation. (Note: INEC has told us that they are going to capture fingerprints and photos of all voters, which would require that every voter re-register since that system was not in use in 2003. It also presents substantial logistical problems. End Note.)

¶5. (S) In addition to the possibility that the electoral playing field would not be level, Haruna hinted at the possibility of military intervention. When discussing IBB, Haruna said that IBB had little popular support among Nigerians. IBB was once viewed as a generous man but no

longer is. That hurts his popular support. However, Haruna believes that he does have active support from the elites of the country. This is particularly true of military elites, both active and retired. He also said that Nigeria's fundamental problems today stem from annulling the 1993 elections, which were seen as free and fair, and led to the brutal Abacha dictatorship. However, he did not predict a military coup. The conversation only hinted at the possibility that Nigeria could resume her traditional manner of changing government.

¶16. (C) COMMENT. Haruna is the Christian governor of a predominately Muslim state. The Ambassador last met with him in December 2005. Haruna initially won office when running as Lieutenant Governor. Atiku was the gubernatorial candidate and stepped aside to become Vice President. Haruna then became governor. He said that he anticipates holding high national office if Atiku wins the presidency. However, while leaving the door open to another gubernatorial run, he said that he did not enjoy being governor under the Obasanjo administration and did not plan to run again. While he laughed when raising it, he said he might be seeking asylum in the United States if Atiku does not win. Speaking more seriously, he said he might leave the country just before his term in office ended (and thus his immunity from prosecution expired). He did not mention a specific criminal charge he expected to face, but instead raised the specter of a false charge from EFCC.

¶17. (S) COMMENT CONTINUED. We are hearing an increasing number of voices say that they believe President Obasanjo intends to stay in office and is willing to use the apparatus of the state, including the EFCC, to extend his time. Haruna seemed pessimistic almost to the point of depression. He spoke extremely slowly, but it was very difficult to

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interject something in to the conversation. He is one more voice sounding a bad omen for 2007. END COMMENT.
CAMPBELL